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MY NAME IS LOLA
by Lola Rozsa,
as told to and written by Susie Sparks

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Call Me 'Mammaw'

Mary Lil's little jab to my conscience was undoubtedly meant to remind me that, despite the fact I'd become a grandmother when she was only thirteen, I was still expected to attend to all the motherly details, too. Truthfully, it *was* kind of discombobulating to become a grandmother at forty-six, especially since I thought I was still a long way from launching my two remaining children.

Reed was stationed at Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane, Washington shortly after Howard was born in 1966, so I felt very lucky that Ruth Ann and the baby were able to come home so frequently during those first few years. The kids had decided upon Howard's birth, since Nannie had become 'Nannaw' once she became a grandmother, I would have to be 'Mammaw,' and that's the way it stuck. And I'm happy to say it's stayed that way through seven grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Ted's new company, Basset Oil, was incorporated in 1969 and was growing rapidly. Baby Karen joined Ruth Ann's family that same year and the children were even more accessible, so we got to see them often, but Ted and I both pined for even more time with these precious grandchildren. Following them around the United States and then to Guam when they were posted there during the Vietnam War from 1971 to the fall of Saigon in '73 wasn't enough for either of us. But that was the career Reed had chosen and Ruth Ann discovered she really enjoyed life in the military. She developed

a very successful home business that contributed substantially to their family's income so she didn't need to spend time away from the children when they were little, and I think she adapted to that life very happily.

Young Ted, meanwhile, was still at Michigan State and had been dating Sandy, whom he married before he graduated. They moved off campus to start their married life and their two boys, Scott and T.J., were born in Michigan, followed by Stacy, who came along after their family relocated to Texas. By the time Stacy was born in 1973, Ted and I had welcomed five grandchildren in the span of seven years.

I remember thinking how Nannie would have wrapped those little ones close to her heart, and how perfect it would have been for them to hear her stories about their extended family. Sadly, though, we had just lost Nannie to the infirmities of old age and I grieved for her still. She had lived a long and generous life and left a legacy of loving gifts with whomever she had touched. And yet, as I moved beyond her, I came to realize that her life was so very confined by her circumstances of time and place. I could see why all of us siblings were drawn back to our *first* family. It was a simpler time when the lessons she and Preacher taught us made sense in that smaller, less-complicated world. Ours was infinitely bigger and more complex, and I knew very well that the world our grandchildren would inherit was as yet incomprehensible to any of us.

All the Estes siblings had gathered in Denton in 1970, and we celebrated Nannie's last birthday along with Karen's first. I think Nannie would have appreciated the symbolic closure of her life as she left her newest great-grandchild to carry on.

I wish I could say we survived to see the end of the domestic fallout from Vietnam during the '60s, but the '70s opened to escalated violence in reaction to President Nixon's so-called peace-with-honour invasion of Cambodia. A month later, we watched in horror as the Ohio National Guard fired on protesting anti-war students at Kent State University killing four and injuring nine others.

It would take another three years before the United States finally pulled out of Vietnam. By that time, even Canadian students had joined the anti-war movement, and when Mary Lil became a hippie we knew we had misjudged this generation. Somewhere along the way, they had lost respect for the people leading the country. They were faced with a choice none of them wanted to make. They didn't see themselves as anti-American; they were anti-war. Would they go to Vietnam to fight in what they saw as an unjust war if they were drafted, or would they refuse? Should they stay in school to keep their deferments, especially knowing that it would be the high-school dropouts who would take their places – the kids who didn't have their advantages?

In defence of the older generation, I can say that the actions of the students on the militant left overshadowed the vast majority of those who only sat in at peace-and-love demonstrations. But the very fact that the SDS and the Weathermen were populated by some of those bright, middle-class college kids was truly frightening. If we lost that generation, what would become of the society we'd worked so hard to rebuild after World War II?

Within three years, the United States pulled out of Vietnam, Vice President Agnew resigned from office following his plea of no contest to charges of bribery, extortion, and tax fraud, and President Nixon's gang of thieves was on trial for the Watergate robberies. It was a time that profoundly informed the values of those young people.

In Canada, we were somewhat insulated from all of that conflict, but our children felt very much a part of it. And of course we in Canada had problems of our own in 1970. In Montreal, the FLQ kidnapped British Trade Commissioner James Cross and Quebec's Labour Minister Pierre Laporte. Their demands were for the release of twenty-three political prisoners, half a million dollars, and the broadcast and publication of the FLQ manifesto, along with an airplane to take them to Cuba.

In response, Prime Minister Trudeau invoked the War Measures Act and called in armed federal forces to assist the Quebec police. In relatively short order, the separatist terrorists were either in residence in Cuba, rounded up, or tried and convicted in court. However, the movement toward a separate Quebec continued to escalate.

And, as predicted, the cultural imbalance as a result of the huge American immigration and investment-capital invasion beginning in the early '50s finally caused the Canadian arts community to take action.

Canada, despite the perception of many in the United States, is *not* a northern American state. Our culture in Canada is really quite different. Canada has a different history, different traditions, and a public policy that is emphatically salad bowl rather than melting pot. Canada's settlement history wasn't entirely without conflict, but those early interactions with both Inuit and First Nations people didn't involve the kind of carnage that took place south of the border. Slavery did exist in Canada, but not widely and not for long. We have two official first languages and we are religiously diverse. We have publicly funded health care, and our tax dollars help support educational institutions from elementary schools through universities. Canadians believe that every citizen should expect equal access to excellent health care and education, and we are particularly proud that our students attending public schools in Alberta currently test among the highest in the world. We are governed by the Parliamentary system inherited from Great Britain, we follow English Common Law, we don't permit capital punishment in Canada, and we have progressive social legislation.

If I sound like I'm delivering a lecture, I apologize, but it's a speech I got used to delivering to my Texas clan. There never seemed to be any Canadian news coverage in the States. As Pierre Trudeau once famously said, "Living next to you is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant. No matter how friendly and even-tempered the beast, one is affected by every twitch and grunt."

He was right then as well as now. We are truly inundated by American culture in all its forms. Understandably so; Canada shares a very porous border with the United States that permits unlimited access by every American television network, plus countless cable channels, radio broadcasts, and print publications. American music, dance, theatre, literature, and art dominate simply because we share a common language, and its cultural export is ten times larger than our own population of artists can produce in Canada. By 1970, Canadian culture was being pushed to the margins and risked disappearing altogether.

In defence, the CRTC finally dictated that a certain percentage of a domestic broadcaster's transmission time had to include content produced by Canadians. AM radio music programming had to include Canadian-produced songs, there was a federal policy to provide financial assistance to Canadian book publishing, and the Canada Council was formed to promote the production and enjoyment of the arts in Canada. By the end of the decade, the cultural pendulum began adjusting slowly toward the centre.

We began to see more and more Canadian artists being featured at the Calgary Philharmonic concerts including pianists like Marc-André Hamelin, Angela Hewitt, Anton Kuerti, Jon Kimura Parker, and Louis Lortie. James Ehnes, the Canadian violinist, is arguably the best in the world right now, as is Ben Heppner, the Canadian tenor. But perhaps most definitively Canadian are composers like R. Murray Shafer and Harry Somers. To hear their music is to understand how very much our culture is influenced by our unique geography. They are to the ear, what the Group of Seven painters are to visual art. Undoubtedly, the decisions made back in the '70s have nurtured those talents and have brought Canadian music and musicians to the front of the world stage.

Mary Lil, our Canadian-born child, had benefited most by this shift in cultural perception. She knew that Canada offered her experiences she could find nowhere else in the world. Every summer, she'd been going off to Pioneer Ranch Camp at Rocky Mountain

House both as a camper and then as a leader. She was a strong skier and an experienced hiker and had spent a lot of time in the mountains, so wilderness adventure was a big part of her life.

After she graduated from high school in 1971, she heard from Reed that a Whitworth College prof was launching an expedition across the Northwest Territories from Yellowknife to Baker Lake to do a mapping project in cooperation with the Canadian government. Reed had met this fellow at a survival training course and was impressed by his plans. For two months, he and eighteen students would travel the Arctic river systems in canoes and portage where they couldn't get through by water.

Ted and I were flabbergasted when Mary Lil announced that she wanted to go along. She didn't know anyone on the expedition, and she would be the youngest of the group. But there were a couple of other women, so I guess we thought she could probably handle it too. "In case of emergency," she said, "we'll be carrying some sort of walkie-talkie arrangement. There's a NORAD plane that flies over this river system once a week so if we get into trouble they can help us." (You can imagine how much *that* information reassured me.) "Besides," she said, "if I go I can earn three credits toward my university degree." She knew which buttons to push. Since she was looking toward including this trip in her long range college plans, this was one of those once-in-a-lifetime experiences we weren't going to deny her.

Mary Lil met the group at Whitworth to take part in their training exercises. They flew to Yellowknife, rented eight Grumman canoes, loaded them up with food and provisions to last eight weeks, and pushed off on a trip of 1,100 miles through herds of musk oxen and caribou. She said it was a slow start, however, because by the end of the first day on the water they realized they were so heavy they were barely floating. Provisions would have to be jettisoned. But, since only the food was expendable, this meant they'd *really* have to live off the land.

She described how they would camp close to the water overnight and watch the sky turn a hazy rose as the sun dipped toward the horizon, paused, and started its slow ascent once again. At night, herds of migrating caribou would come so close to their camp they seemed to be curious about them, yet too cautious to come closer. Someone suggested they crouch down like rocks scattered across the muskeg. Evidently the caribou had the same idea so there they were in an Arctic Mexican standoff, neither species willing to make the first move.

Mary Lil still talks about the musk oxen. She said they looked like stout British gentlemen gliding across the barrens, long heavy hair smooth as silk. And when they circled protecting their young, she knew better than to approach. They found a wolf's den and waited to see whether the pups were in residence and, sure enough, Farley Mowat was right. The mother came back to move each one of them away from the prying eyes of the strangers who had invaded her territory. There were wolverines and arctic loons, and one time they climbed a thirty-foot rock wall to see a nest with four peregrine falcon chicks.

At that time of year, the surface of the permafrost softens to spongy muskeg and, although they had tents for protection, when they were off the water, they were fodder for the ravenous Arctic black flies. She said they coated themselves and their tents in repellent imported directly from the jungles of Vietnam and strained their food through their mosquito net headgear, but that didn't discourage the giant mosquitoes. They were slow and easy to kill but there were so many hovering and whining around their heads all night, the torture was unrelenting.

After about a month, the food they hadn't dumped overboard on the first day of the trip was getting pretty sparse in addition to downright tedious, so they started fishing for grayling and Arctic char and agreed that dumping all that dried pasta and meat-like gorp was the smartest thing they ever did. But even though they were eating well, they were more than thrilled to find that the Hudson's Bay boat had

just arrived when they pulled their canoes out of the water at Baker Lake. They celebrated the end of their adventure with fresh produce.

I was enormously proud of her for taking that opportunity. She and the other girls on the trip were the first white women to make that trek, and she was first in line to sign up for the next trip the following summer. I can't say I ever quit worrying about her safety, but since she was smart enough never to tell me any of the *really* scary details, it got easier as she gained more experience.

At the same time Mary Lil was trekking the Arctic, I was trekking the golf course with the ladies from the Country Club. One day, obviously when I was distracted by other issues, a woman from the Calgary Ladies Golf Association approached me asking if I'd let my name fill a spot on the nominations slate for their executive election. And almost before I figured out I had actually volunteered to be the sacrificial lamb, I was elected vice president.

In truth, though, I discovered I really enjoyed helping to arrange the city championship tournaments and, in 1974, I also served with the provincial association as the Calgary zone chairman. As teams chairman, I had to attend all the provincial tournaments to identify the female golfers who would compete at the national tournaments, and that's how I got to know so many of the very young golfers who were playing during the '70s and into the middle 1980s.

When I first met them, I couldn't understand how, with such a casual attitude toward the game, they could be so talented. Some of them would wander into the tournaments with mismatched clubs, and some played in their sneakers because they didn't own golf shoes. They chatted amongst themselves down the fairway seemingly without a care in the world. But the minute they stood up to address the ball, you could see the raw talent that would be honed as they matured. What they brought to their game was a genuine love for golf combined with a huge desire to do their best.

Judy Medlicott, Linda Rankin, Jackie Twamley, Marilyn Karch, Dawne Kortgaard, Lauren Rouse, Trish Murphy, Paula Imeson; there were so many talented young golfers in that era. We'd celebrate

their good games, and I'd comfort them if they played poorly, and I thoroughly enjoyed every minute of my time with them. Now, of course, those young women are senior champions and they've been kind enough to stay in touch through all these years. Judy was totally irreverent about the game and always had a trick or two to play on me during the tournaments, so when she instigated my nomination to the Alberta Golf Hall of Fame in 2008, she made sure all the girls were on hand to accompany the ceremony with their cheer. "Lo – La! Lo – La! Lo – La!" rang out as I went to the podium to receive that wonderful honour. I think Judy paid me the greatest compliment ever: "Lola always had the right thing to say when she was chaperoning all of us to those tournaments. It was never all about golf. Lola's focus was always on fun. She made sure we got to see the ocean when we were out in the Atlantic provinces and that we could go sightseeing in the cities."

Judy (Medlicott) Forshner is now head pro at the Glencoe Golf and Country Club, and she's never lost that irreverent streak. She said that one day she was teaching the little kids' clinic to a gaggle of five-year-olds fresh from kindergarten where they had had a visiting fireman tell them all about fire safety. Obviously the fireman was a great teacher because they all came away knowing exactly what to do in case their clothing ever started on fire.

Judy, however, was trying to divert their attention back to her own lesson on the etiquette of the golf game. She had them all lined up at the driving range smacking range balls as far they could, and interrupted them to ask, "Now what do you yell if you accidentally hit your ball toward someone else?" Instantly, one eager little boy threw his club in the air and yelled, "Stop, Drop and Roll!"

Be warned. If you're ever golfing ahead of Judy, should you hear her yell, "Stop Drop and Roll," duck and cover.

I stayed with the Alberta Ladies Golf Association as vice-president in 1982 and '83, and as president in 1984 and '85, and accompanied the national team to Nova Scotia, London, Ontario, and the Canadian Open in Newfoundland and Saskatchewan. But a real

highlight of my career in golf was when I was with the Canadian Ladies Golf Association in 1986, serving as a rules official, and was able to take a week-long rules course from the USGA in New Jersey.

However, I eventually knew I was in the wrong place when I was chastised by one of the women on the executive of the Canadian national association for loaning a skirt to one of the golfers on the American team. I was told in no uncertain terms that it was inappropriate to offer assistance to competitors on other teams, even if it was only wardrobe assistance. And then, in that condescending tone reserved only for the extremely self-important, she said, "Lola dear, you have a Southern accent. Tell me, where are you from?"

I smiled sweetly and said, "I'm from south Calgary."

Life's too short; I went back to play golf with the women who know it's only a game and the object is to have fun, and became president of the ladies golf section of the Country Club.

Besides, there were other attractions back home in Calgary.

Ted's company, Basset Oil, had caught the wave created by OPEC in the early 1970s and was riding high and flourishing, producing more than 6,500 barrels a day from forty-one wells. OPEC had been founded to coordinate petroleum policies among international members of oil-producing nations, and it rose to international prominence as member countries took control of their domestic petroleum industries and acquired a major say in the pricing of crude oil on world markets. Oil prices rose steeply, triggered by the Arab oil embargo in 1973 and the outbreak of the Iranian Revolution in 1979. So, despite the fact that Canada wasn't a member of OPEC, the Alberta economy was booming again, thanks to high oil prices.

The company was so busy that Ted and I discussed the possibility of inviting both young Ted and Reed to join Basset, and it seemed to be the right time to initiate that proposal. Ted was working in Texas but had told me that if he could ever be of help in his dad's company, he'd like to do that. Reed was still in the Air Force and on a direct career path toward becoming a major, but when the invitation was issued, he was immediately interested, even though

Ruth Ann discouraged it. She knew he was exceptionally good at his job, she and the kids enjoyed military life, and he was about to reap the benefits of a significant promotion.

Ted tells me, however, that when he and Sandy and the kids arrived at the Canadian border, they stopped for a long second thought. He had essentially been on his own since he left high school, so joining his father's company demanded some pretty intensive soul-searching. His father had sweetened the offer and tied it to an opportunity for the kids to buy homes in the newly developed subdivision of Lake Bonaventure. Ted would be making a good living, which would compensate him for having to be out in the field so much of his time, and the three children would have many of the advantages he couldn't have promised them if he'd stayed in Texas.

Mary Lil laughs when she remembers this time in our lives because it was so obvious to her that I had always hoped to gather our family together again, and now Ted had the wherewithal to make that happen. Ted and Sandy crossed the border in 1974 and settled into their new house and Ted's new job with Basset. Reed resigned his commission from the Air Force, and he and Ruth Ann, along with their two children, arrived from Ohio a year later and moved into a house not far from Ted and Sandy on Lake Bonaventure.

And, despite my oath about hell freezing over before I'd leave the wonderful bungalow where we'd raised our family, Ted finally convinced me in 1976 to move into a much larger house directly across the lake from our two children and five grandchildren. Mary Lil was a student at Trinity University in San Antonio by this time, and after graduation she would be back and forth as she established her career, but her fixed address was still with us.

The house was certainly large enough to house all the visiting Estes clan, and we were able to convince most of them to come-stay-awhile those summers. One time Ruth Ann dropped by with her friends Mike and Deb O'Connor. Mike was on his motorcycle and I was admiring it, so he thought he'd tease me a little by inviting me to hop on for a ride. I'm sure he never expected me to jump on the

back but, practically before he finished the invitation, I had the extra helmet on my head and was yelling, "Let's go!" We took off down the cul de sac and blasted down Macleod Trail laughing insanely the whole way. Ruth Ann said I had bugs in my teeth when I got back.

The lake was a four-season playground for all the grandchildren. There were wind surfers and paddleboats docked against our deck all summer, and the kids could head for our house to warm up after tobogganing on the island or playing hockey on the lake in the winter. Within a few years, all five grandchildren would be in the same school together.

Best of all, the twelve of us could assemble around our dinner table every Sunday evening for Southern fried chicken with all the trimmin's. By the time the kids had wolfed down the green beans seasoned in bacon drippings and the mashed potatoes smothered in chicken-fried gravy, and the still-warm-from-the-oven cornbread, I had carbo-loaded them enough for a solid week and they could go home to fresh fruit and veggies. But I think you should know, it's that Southern fried chicken they all remember best.